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CHARLES HOWARD MONTAGUE

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CHAPTER I
THE PATIENT.

A frail and changeless expression, a single sentiment in the dark eyes, turning restlessly from one serious face to the other. A single sentiment in the timid trembling of the pale lips, in the expression of the delicate nostrils, in the nervous contraction of the brows that accompany it.

For a mind which betrays itself in a countenance such as this, all the possibilities of existence, all that remains of life and happiness, can be summed up in one terrible word—*Isolation*. Henceforth this was all that the infinite world of thought and all the endless pleasure of being could mean to this poor creature.

In the midst of the morning, the free air, the song of the birds, the whisper of leaves, the voices of friendship, she must continue to live on as unconcerned of them all as if her life had been narrowed down to the darkness dungeon of an ineffectual.

To deprive a face that beams with intelligence and beauty of the one light that makes it prize, that makes it the twinkling of an eye that unnumbered universes that exist in the brain of an individual and leave in its place a weary candle like this glimmering in the night—what a measureless crime! And such a crime has been committed. Does it add anything to the depth of the injury or to the burden of the guilt that the poor victim was but 19 and had been struck down in the fulness of health and strength?

The patient sat on the edge of the bed from which she had lately arisen in an alcove chamber opening into a large apartment, furnished like a sitting room. Two grave and interested physicians, one gray haired and advanced in years, the other of middle age, were watching her. There was no evidence that either of those men comprehended anything of the unutterable pathos of the situation. Their problem was purely a physiological one. The moral aspects of the case concerned them only when they asked a diagnosis. They were waiting for the motion of the poor girl's hands, clasping and unclasping themselves in her lap, the pathetic cry, without an attempt at attention, that she uttered from time to time, those were the matters that interested them.

"I have observed a very curious thing," the elder physician was saying. "It is possible, of course, that you may be mistaken, but if I am not then this girl possesses a curious power in a remarkable degree."

The younger man repeated the phrase with no little wonder. "A curious power?"

"Yes, a very curious power. I should say, of what, for want of a better term, I will call optical retention. You know what I mean?"

"No."

"I mean the faculty of retaining a scene in the mind after the eyes are closed or the scene removed. We all have it in varying degree. You mention the writing table at my office, and immediately an image, tolerably distinct, of the size, shape and general appearance of the table rises before my mental vision. I mean simply, if this girl were familiar with the looks of that table and she could be made to understand what I am talking about, she would see the object in question so vividly that it would be to her almost the reality—perhaps, I might say, practically the reality."

The younger physician regarded the speaker in silent wonder.

"You don't take my meaning?"

"Oh, perfectly. My term for it is visualization. What puzzles me is that you should see any evidence of it here. What has she done to show it?"

"Not any one thing so much as everything. I generalize it from a careful observation of her movements."

"Do you call it a symptom?"

"No—that is, I don't know. It may be abnormal, or it may be natural to her in a state of health. I have studied several cases. One, very young woman who could find a way unerringly about a familiar place blindfolded. Her family called it intuition. The gray haired physician followed him. They retired into the farthest corner and conversed themselves from the picture a view behind a curtain, but where, by slightly disarranging the drapery, they could easily see her. Either because their

"Not I. But is this an idiot?"

"Wam—ah—The younger physician

CHAPTER II
THE PATIENT.

They could easily watch her, department had started her or because the mysterious force at work in her disorganized intellect happened to manifest themselves at that moment, she had started as the moved that strange, faint, insubstantial cry which was so terrible to the good people who took care of her. The two physicians simply noted it as a curious fact.

"It seems to me, Lamar, that the problem in this case narrows itself down to a question as to whether the patient's present condition is due to the blow she is known to have received upon the head or to the purely mental results of the error caused by the accident."

"Surely," said the younger man, "you do not wish me to understand that you believe it even possible that such a condition should be the result of simple terror or pure mental action of any kind. It seems almost certain to me that there was some structural or functional disorder prior to the accident."

"Very possibly. I did not say to the contrary. Some of her symptoms almost indicate a pressure on the brain, but a long experience in an accident hospital has convinced me that I am almost certain that the symptoms are so vague and unpronounced. I have known such a variety of different and unconnected mental states to result from the fright incident to a loss of consciousness, under a pressure of excitement, that I am almost ready to attribute any abnormal mental state to the shock of the terror, pure and simple."

"Last year we had a patient who had been thrown from a carriage while his horse was running away. The man himself was not hurt, but he always persisted in a denial that he had ever come to ride. The accident robbed him of his memory, not only of the event, but of the fact that he had ever come to ride. The accident robbed him of his memory, not only of the event, but of the fact that he had ever come to ride."

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